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AUTHOR	Fier, Harriet, Ed.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This user guide is part of a multimedia unit using an interdisciplinary approach with hands-on learning to motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. This unit focuses on the concept that democracy works best when everyone participates. Unit parts include: (1) video preview; (2) suggestions for using the unit; (3) getting ready to view the video; (4) video modeling lesson; (5) follow-up activities for primary, intermediate, and upper grade children; and (6) a bibliography for children and teachers. (EH)

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For Grades K-6

My America
Building a Democracy

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Available in English and Spanish

ED 404 266

Becoming An Active Citizen

User Guide

SO 026 509

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My America: Building a Democracy

GOALS

To help children:

- become familiar with the democratic process and active citizenship,
- recognize what it means to be a citizen in a multicultural society,
- build skills in communications and cooperation,
- recognize how laws are made and how a single vote and voice matter, and
- experience how caring and commitment build community.

FORMAT

MY AMERICA is a 12-unit series, consisting of:

- 15-20 minute videos
- User Guides
- Resource Directory Disks (MS-DOS & MAC)

Materials were designed by educators, for educators. An interdisciplinary approach to hands-on learning is used.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

The MY AMERICA kits motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. The series attempts to demystify the government, explain how laws are made, and show how American democracy is always evolving. MY AMERICA combines elements of traditional civics and social studies curricula with techniques and activities that encourage children to participate and become involved. **Its underlying theme is: Democracy works best when everyone participates.**

MY AMERICA teaches in the voices of children in a way that respects their intelligence and natural curiosity.

THE VIDEOS

Each tape contains on-location documentaries, animation and historical illustration. A classroom modeling lesson encourages children to use their skills in reading, writing, listening, painting, singing and performing. The cooperative learning model is central to each video.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

Videos are developed within the following framework:

Kid View: Children give thought-provoking, lively opinions on each topic.

Documentary: Historical context and current concerns are blended with examples of children making a difference in their communities. This section is rich in historical information and opens up a wide range of discovery possibilities.

Modeling Lesson: Educators and students develop an interdisciplinary activity designed to bring alive the educational objective of the video.

Wrap Up: The key concept is recapped from the diverse perspectives of both children and adults.

PAUSE POINTS

The videotapes can be used in a variety of ways. Some educators use the tapes to teach three separate lessons on a concept. To facilitate this usage, a blackboard icon comes up between the Kid View, the Documentary and the Modeling Lesson, giving educators appropriate PAUSE POINTS during which to elaborate on concepts.

THE USER GUIDES

Guides provide multiple learning experiences, lesson plans and bibliographies built around social studies and citizenship themes. Suggested activities are interdisciplinary in approach and focus on skills in communication and cooperation.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY DISKS (MS-DOS & MAC)

MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disks include black-lined master activity sheets, samples of letters to parents and organizations, petitions, proclamations and press releases—all of which can be customized. Also included are a listing of additional resources, bibliographic references for students and teachers, historical documents, and curriculum correlations.

This icon indicates that additional material is available on the MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disk.

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Becoming An Active Citizen

My America
Building a Democracy

Educational objective:

To understand that democracy works best when everyone participates.

Student concept:

I can make a difference.

Video preview

Being a good citizen means being an active, caring citizen. Children define who citizens are and what citizens do in a democratic country. We hear the story of John Chapman, the person we know as Johnny Appleseed, who became legendary for helping people and planting apple trees. We see a modern day good-citizen story about how the children of Des Moines, Iowa, and Homestead, Florida, helped each other during two terrible natural disasters. In Washington, DC, children create an Energy Patrol Project that saved their school $17,000 in one year while giving them an opportunity to accomplish important work and make a true difference.

"I think citizens should be willing to help anybody when they think someone needs help. I think a citizen should take care of the Earth because it is going to be here for a long time."

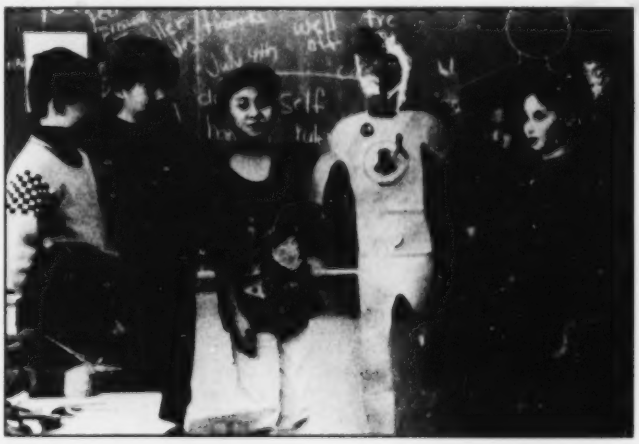
—Sixth Grader
New York

Suggestions for using "Becoming An Active Citizen"

As an Opening and/or Culminating Experience to a Unit of Study: The video and suggested activities are designed to supplement your existing social studies curriculum. They are highly motivating resources to introduce and engage students and help them understand that everyone counts in a democracy.

As an Individual Lesson: Suggested activities provide experiences to help children understand that active citizens create strong democracies. Activities are divided into those appropriate for primary, intermediate and upper elementary school children.

As an Assembly Program: On 3 X 5 cards, children write their name and three sentences that start out with the words "I am an active citizen when I..." The children place the cards in a container as they come into the auditorium. The teacher/facilitator randomly picks 10 cards and invites the children who wrote them to read their statements to the group. Introduce the *Becoming an Active Citizen* video.



My America
Building a Democracy

Becoming An Active Citizen

"If you turn off the lights when you leave a room it saves money, it saves energy and sort of saves the world."

—Fifth Grader
Park View Elementary School
Washington, DC

Getting ready to view the video

Active citizens create democracies that are full of vitality and hope. As America and the world move toward a new century of possibility, it is more essential than ever that children be educated in active citizenship skills.

• You may decide to teach all curriculum areas through the activities generated by active citizenship projects. Reading, writing, listening, speaking and cooperating exercises can focus on the real work of citizens who volunteer to care for their community. If this idea is not practical in your situation, set aside specific weekly times to design, develop and implement projects.

• Read the legend of Johnny Appleseed and discuss how a person is remembered by an inspiring story which lives over time. Who are other legendary people the children know? Create a special corner for books and photographs of people who have made their world a better place. Set aside time each day for the children to learn the stories of these active citizens of the past and present.

• Encourage the children to close their eyes and imagine a moment in the future. Ask them to imagine what they will do to care for life on Earth when they are adults. The children write a sentence on a 3 X 5 card, which begins with: "I take care of life on the Earth by ..." Children share their active citizen dreams with each other.

Key vocabulary: citizen, democracy, community, participate, volunteer, legend, legacy, hurricane, flood, natural disaster

Key phrases: "a naturalized American citizen," "an oath of allegiance," "all life on the planet is connected," "a citizen of the Earth"

Video Modeling Lesson: Saving Energy

★The children look for ways to reduce energy costs by operating the school in an energy-efficient manner. Discuss the types of energy the school uses and who supplies this energy.

★The children work with the administration and custodial engineer to learn how much money was spent on energy in the previous year. Children review the school energy budget and brainstorm opportunities to cut costs.

★Collectively generate an Energy Patrol Check List to document areas of operation that need maintenance or replacement.

★Divide the children into teams. Ask them to look for equipment that functions poorly, or inefficient procedures that cost money and require too much energy.

★Children tour the building with their clipboards and checklists, looking for broken windows, lights left on, leaking radiators and doors left open.

★The children make a list of Energy Savers and Energy Wasters and use the information to create a presentation to other classes. The activity could take the form of a rap song, short skit or series of bulletin boards with photographs the children take.

★Invite people to see and hear what the class learned and what they improved. Share energy-efficient tips with friends and family within and outside the school. Celebrate!

★Modeling Lesson Materials: chart paper, magic markers, clipboards, pencils, pens, a calculator

Becoming An Active Citizen

My America
Building a Democracy

Follow-up activities for primary grade children

★Discuss how important it is for people to save energy. Brainstorm ways the children can save energy at home and at school. Create a bulletin board of suggestions. Children sign their names under the energy-saving activities they do—riding a bike or walking to school; keeping the water off while brushing their teeth; using cloth instead of paper napkins or towels; recycling paper, glass and aluminum; turning lights off when leaving a room; and using fans instead of air conditioners. At the end of each month, celebrate everyone who works to save energy. Children design Energy Saver Certificates to distribute.

★Children vote on adopting a vacant lot, rundown area of a park or a sick tree to care for during the school year. Each child presents his or her opinion about a selection and answers questions from the group. The top vote is adopted as a class project to care for, revitalize and cherish. Remember to involve parents and siblings as you create a list of activities, necessary resources and a timeline for the children's active citizen project.

★Voting is an important part of being an active citizen. Although the children are not old enough, they can encourage older citizens to vote. Give children time to think about and generate a list of ways they can remind people to take the time to vote. Once the list is generated, divide the children into cooperative working groups to design letters, posters, newspaper ads, marches and other special events to catalyze interest and involvement.

Follow-up activities for intermediate grade children

★Communication and cooperation skills are central to the curriculum and to effective active citizenship projects. A powerful way to integrate these skills with the spirit of active citizenship is to design collaboratively a 10-month project that will engage the children's imaginations; provide practical, skill-building opportunities; and leave the world a better place.

★Discuss, debate and vote on a local community issue that needs attention, (like the Video Modeling Lesson: Debating a Class Project in the *What Is a Democracy?* kit). Divide the children into cooperative working groups to identify goals, tasks, resources, talent, documentation and timelines for the chosen project. Update each other every week.

★Share research findings and progress throughout the year within the school community and in the community-at-large. This can be accomplished through a simple newsletter, bulletin boards, assembly programs, press releases and informational meetings. Use your local media to focus attention on the importance of the issue and the project-in-process. See the MY AMERICA for sample press releases.

★Organizing a local march to show support for a social issue is another good way to get media attention. The children outline the questions that need to be addressed in order to hold a march to support their community project. (See the MY AMERICA *Liberty and Justice* kit for the historic 1963 March on Washington for Civil Rights.)

"Activism pays the rent on being alive and being here on the planet."

—Alice Walker

Find It In The MY AMERICA

- **Lyrics of the "Energy Patrol Rap"**
- **Listing of Organizations**
- **Sample Letters, Petitions, Press Releases**

My America
Building a Democracy

Becoming An Active Citizen

"A citizen is someone who tries to make things better."
—Sixth Grader
Minnesota

Follow-up activities for upper grade children

★ Through advances in communication the world becomes smaller and Americans learn more quickly about people in other cultures and countries. When we enter the 21st century, active citizenship will reflect our roles as citizens of the planet as well as our country. It is time to live in a way that honors the fact that all life on Earth is connected.

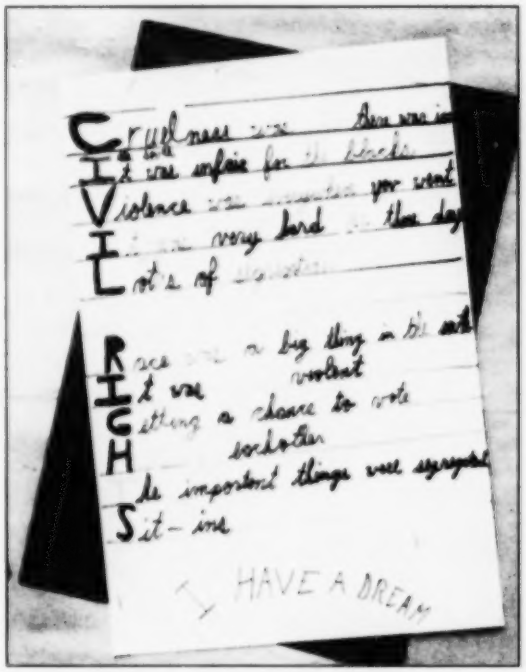
★ In the Native American tradition, the impact of each decision is measured on how it will affect the next seven generations. Write a Declaration of Interdependence that will ignite imaginations and open up new patterns for living and learning together in peace.

★ Print a copy of the Declaration of Independence from the Historical Documents file of the MY AMERICA. Make and distribute copies to each of the children. Have a choral reading of Thomas Jefferson's great document. Play appropriate background music to open the head and heart to the great task at hand.

★ Help the children understand the power and impact of Jefferson's thoughts on the birth of our nation. Discuss how it once again is time to break from negative attitudes and prepare the way for a society that lives up to the ideal of "the greatest good for the greatest number."

★ Give the children time to work independently and in groups to craft a Declaration of Interdependence for active 21st century citizens. Help the children become familiar with Jefferson's words and those of the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy and the "I Have a Dream" speech of Martin Luther King, Jr. These can be found in the MY AMERICA. All three documents are powerful models of active citizens trying to reinvent their world.

★ Share and celebrate the writing of the Declaration of Interdependence with other children, teachers, parents and the community-at-large. Be sure to send a copy to the MY AMERICA for publication.



The MY AMERICA Newsletter publishes active citizenship projects and activities. Send your photos, stories, and videotapes to:

MY AMERICA
Newsletter
c/o New Castle
Communications
229 King Street
Chappaqua, NY 10514

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Building a Democracy

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MY AMERICA BOARD OF ADVISORS

Robert Berger
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Check the MY AMERICA for additional books, resources, and activity sheets to extend the concepts of *What Is An American?*

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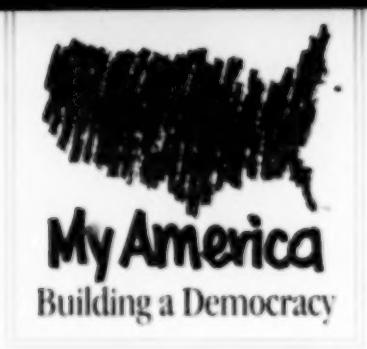

MY AMERICA:
LEARNING ABOUT
DEMOCRACY

USER GUIDES and DIRECTORY DISK

Editor
Harriet Fier

Writer/Editor
Anne Marie Santoro

Researchers
Toby Appleton
Jenny Gillespie

Art Direction
David Kaestle, Inc.

Production
MSI New York

Photography
Robin Bowman
Marianne Barcellona
Steve Northrup

MY AMERICA consists of the following program titles:

What Is a Flag?
A Pledge Is a Promise
Neighborhood and Community
Liberty and Justice
What Is an American?
The Story of the National Anthem
What Is a Democracy??
How Our Laws Are Made
Becoming an Active Citizen
Rights and Responsibilities

Teaching in a Multicultural Society (For Teachers)
Parents, Teachers and Community: Working Together (For Parents)

Resources available, AT NO CHARGE, when you purchase the entire multimedia series:
MY AMERICA Newsletter: published three times during the school year.
MY AMERICA Teacher Training Video: 10 classroom activities around civic issues.

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

—The Great Law of the Six Nations
Iroquois Confederacy

About New Castle Communications, Inc.
MY AMERICA is published by New Castle Communications, Inc. The company is creating educational materials in video, print and computer software formats. New Castle Communications is committed to designing, producing and distributing multimedia materials that engage children and inspire them to get involved in their classrooms, schools and communities.

NEW CASTLE COMMUNICATIONS, INC.
229 King Street, Chappaqua, NY 10514 914-238-0600 Fax: 914-238-6445